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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 007527

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DEPARTMENT PASS EAP, EAP/MLA, S/CT  
PACOM FOR FPA (HUSO)  
NSC FOR MORROW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/28/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: RTG QUIETLY REACHES OUT TO  
SEPARATIST GROUPS

REF: BANGKOK 7090

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) has been quietly meeting in northern Malaysia and in Europe with purported leadership figures from some of the prominent southern Thai separatist groups -- including the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Coordinate (BRN-C) -- in an attempt to facilitate a dialogue with the Thai government. Prime Minister Thaksin has apparently given his approval for continued exploratory talks in Europe and has given one of his closest advisors responsibility for following the discussions. The high-level interest of the RTG in exploring the possibility of some form of negotiated end to the southern conflict is a positive sign. That being said, it seems unlikely to us that exiled separatist leaders have significant, if any, operational control over militants in the South. It is also unclear to us how these groups would be positioned to address the central issue: widespread estrangement of southern Malay Muslims with the Thai government. END SUMMARY

2. (C) The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC,) also known as the Henri Dunant Centre, based in Geneva, has been working quietly in Thailand, northern Malaysia and Europe over the past year in an effort to identify possible interlocutors among Thai separatist groups. They are attempting to establish a reliable dialogue partner for the Thai government and to facilitate talks between the separatist groups and the Thai government. HDC also aims to encourage cooperation between the Malaysian and Thai governments to address their common challenge along the border. (NOTE: HDC's work is carried out very quietly. They requested that information about their activities be kept confidential. END NOTE)

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3. (C) HDC staff members involved in the project told emboffs that they had met with members of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Coordinate (BRN-C), Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), the Pattani Islamic Mujahideen Movement (GMIP), and Wan Khadir Che Man, the leader of Bersatu -- a separatist "umbrella" organization. HDC noted that all of these groups made varying claims of responsibility for actions in southern Thailand. However, BRN-C appeared to play the more central role (NOTE: Septel will detail how BRN-C is increasingly perceived to be the leading operational organization in the South. END NOTE). HDC confirmed press reports -- publicly denied by the RTG -- that Wan Kadir Che Man has been in direct contact with representatives of the Thai government.

4. (C) HDC's primary interlocutor in Europe is Shamsuddin Khan, reportedly PULO's exiled leader. Khan has apparently been attempting to bring the disparate elements of PULO and other separatist groups together. He has been involved in previous "talks" with the RTG and was the primary interlocutor during a series of negotiations between the RTG and separatist groups which occurred in Cairo and Damascus in 1994. HDC senior staff members believe Khan "has open lines" to separatist groups and can legitimately speak on their behalf. They claimed that the Thai National Intelligence Agency (NIA) agrees Khan could play a constructive role in a negotiation. HDC is attempting to arrange a meeting in Geneva between Khan and a retired Thai Army General as early as this month. Apparently the BRN-C leaders are unwilling to talk directly with RTG officials in Malaysia, but indicated that Khan would serve as their intermediary.

5. (C) HDC staffers indicated that Prime Minister Thaksin is personally aware of their efforts and reported that Pansak Vinyaratn -- Thaksin's chief policy advisor -- approved ongoing exploratory talks. Thaksin has reportedly tasked Pansak with handling contacts between HDC and the separatists.

6. (C) COMMENT: This is all good as far as it goes, but is unlikely to have an impact on the violence in the South any time soon. We do not believe the exiled leaders involved in

these discussions exercise operational control over the disparate militant cells who are actually carrying out attacks. Furthermore, these exiled leaders represent an older generation of ethnic Malay separatist whose struggles of past decades mean little to a new generation of angry Malay youth. Thaksin's support for HDC is a positive sign, showing that the PM is open to this kind of dialogue as part of a possible solution to problems in the South. But valuable as dialogue may be in educating RTG officials on Thai Muslim attitudes and grievances, it does nothing to address fundamental causes of the conflict, particularly the deep-seated sense of "injustice" felt by the majority of Muslims in the far South. END COMMENT  
BOYCE